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A Question for Mr. Shultz

LT. GEN. JOHN T. CHAIN JR., director of the State Department's politico-military bureau, has restored New York Times reporter Leslie Gelb's access to the bureau, after cutting him off "for cause" on grounds that Mr. Gelb, a former director, had willfully published classified information damaging to the United States. Gen. Chain has also removed the sign detailing Mr. Gelb's alleged dereliction that he had put up in place of Mr. Gelb's picture in the gallery of former directors; he did not restore the picture. At the same time, Gen. Chain has reiterated his original charge, notwithstanding reports by other officials that although they opposed publication of the story—about Pentagon contingency plans—Mr. Gelb handled it responsibly and used only material that had been published elsewhere.

Gen. Chain overreacted greatly and nastily in the first instance. In the second instance, he aggravated his offense by freshening his original charge, even while ostensibly undoing some of the damage that flowed from it. With this sort of example of his judgment and style of operating now in public view,

one can only assume that, in private on the job, he is a veritable George Marshall. Otherwise, why would Secretary of State George Shultz want him in such a sensitive post?

Where, by the way, is Secretary of State George Shultz? He was last heard from "supporting" his bureau chief. But it would be good to hear from him on the issues of this case. One is the issue of the public's right to know of important national security information in a category which is classified and subject to being used to embarrass the United States but which is also verified and already in the public domain. A second is the issue of the use of bureaucratic power to punish a journalist and, by extension, to intimidate other journalists. A third is the issue of accusing someone of "willingly, willfully, and knowingly" causing harm to his country—not simply, in this case, a ridiculous charge but an ugly one.

One can guess that Mr. Shultz is not eager to take public issue with an aide. Surely, his recalcitrance does not reflect agreement with what Gen. Chain said and did. Does it?